

55. Signs of Christ's Second Coming

Luke 21:1-11

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Over the last few chapters in the book of Luke, we have been following Jesus as He walked to the city of Jerusalem and knowing what would befall Him over the Passover celebration. We have witnessed the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus (18:35-43), and watched Jesus as He graciously reached out to the tax-man, Zacchaeus. We have seen His passion for God as He upturned the money tables in His Father's house (Matthew 21:12), i.e. desiring it to be a house of prayer instead of the den of robbers that it had become (19:45-48). We have listened to His words of wisdom as He has answered the sly, scheming questions of the chief priests, teachers of the law, and Sadducees (Luke 20:1-47). What shocks people the most was to hear Jesus oppose and condemn the teachers of the law:

⁴⁵While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁶"Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁷They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely" (Luke 20:45-47).

The teachers of the law held themselves out to be the model of those most likely to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but Jesus singled them out for a warning of the direst consequences. Instead of being kind to the poor and lending to the Lord (Proverbs 19:17), these religious men were robbing those who were the most vulnerable of society, the widows (v. 47). Unfortunately, the translators put a chapter division into the middle of Luke's words, separating the widow's offering from the context of the Lord's condemnation of the teachers of the law, but Mark puts the two passages together (Mark 12:38-44).

The Widow's Offering

¹As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ²He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:1-4).

Question 1) Why was Jesus watching people as they gave? What do you think was the woman's reasoning for giving up all on which she had to live?

The widow put two very small copper coins into one of the thirteen offering boxes shaped like trumpets there in the Temple Courts. There are two ways we can look at this passage:

1) This passage of Scripture is placed in the middle of Jesus' speaking judgment against a corrupt religious system. Immediately after talking about the poor widow, Jesus again prophesies judgment against the temple and the ongoing corruption. Perhaps, this widow was one whose house had been "devoured" (Luke 20:47). It gives us a view of the way people were put under compulsion into giving to a religious system that was far away from the heart of God. At the

time of Christ, a widow was not provided for by social services. Having no husband meant that she had no pension plan and no income or visible means of support, yet here she is giving her only means on which to live. Some would say that it is a wonderful picture of a giving heart, but another way that we can look at this story is that of a corrupt system that manipulated those who, at a vulnerable time of their lives, were being taken advantage of instead of cared for in their old age. It is true that God honors a giving heart and those who give to Him in faith, but that does not mean that He was pleased with the corrupt religious system. It grieved the heart of God to see people manipulated and forced by guilt to give what they could not afford to enrich a religious system that was not reflecting the Father's heart but, rather, swindling the poor and the widows.

There are those in our time, as well as then, who will find ways to take advantage of people in their old age. Older people can be "easy prey," and they can be bilked out of their savings, sometimes taking from them all they have saved, convincing them that it is God's will. God has a special love for the widows and orphans and will judge harshly those who oppress them (Malachi 3:5). Religion is an easy way for unscrupulous people to use the fear of God and guilt to convince people to give. You have probably seen this happen in the media and even in popular ministries today.

It is troubling to see people use the Word of God in this way, i.e. to manipulate people for their own ends. Some time ago, *Christianity Today* magazine shared the case reported to the police of a popular evangelist sending a solicitation letter to a person, telling him that, if he didn't give to his ministry, Satan would hit him with "bad things," and that he would "wish that he had never been born." On the other hand, if he responded with a monetary gift, he could expect creative miracles and healings and his finances would come alive again.¹ Let us be reminded again of Jesus' words to those who were devouring widow's houses that **"Such men will be punished most severely"** (Luke 20:47).

2) The second way in which we can view this passage is that Luke is using this example of the widow's offering to illustrate the difference of heart between what He saw in the religious establishment and the common people. There are good spiritual lessons to be learned when one does not have much in the way of financial resources. One learns dependence on God and the people of God and the things that are important as opposed to the trivial, i.e. the necessities of life from luxuries. Was the widow's gift an issue of faith and obedience? Perhaps, she felt that God had spoken to her to give her all.

God alone sees the motives of the heart as to whether or not she was coerced into giving her all on which to live. It may also have been an issue of complete abandonment and dependence on the providence of God. If so, God would have blessed her obedience with His provision. Two very small copper coins would not have bought much, perhaps just one piece of bread. There seems to be no worry of where she will get her next meal. She casts her all into the hands of God.

Our giving is an expression of our faith and trust in God. He watches over those who walk with Him looking for opened empty hands to fill. The Scripture tells us that **"The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him"** (2

¹ <https://bible.org/article/they-devour-widows-houses>

Chronicles 16:9). God is continually watching our expressions of faith and trust in Him. These expressions of trust are evidences to Him of our releasing ourselves from the grip of self into His shepherding care and provision. It is an outward sign that we are freeing ourselves from the *I, me, and mine* syndrome. Self-preservation lays a strong hold on each of us. The widow was quite oblivious to the fact that she was being watched by the Lord. It is an encouragement to know that, when we make sacrifices to our God, He is watching and sees everything that we give and do to further the eternal welfare of those around us. The Lord promises, "**Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you**" (**Matthew 6:4**). Great will be the reward of the poor for their gifts of love toward God and their investments in His Kingdom.

We shouldn't think that God despises generous gifts from those He has blessed with finances in this world. Thank God for those who have the gift of giving (Romans 12:8). Concerning our giving, what pleases God the most? If we hold to the second interpretation, this poor widow gave sacrificially and with a pure motive. Another quality that the Lord loves is when we give with joy. When we give with glad hearts, it demonstrates our trust in God. When King David wanted to stop a plague that had broken out in Jerusalem, God directed him to build an altar and offer sacrifice to stop the plague. The owner of the hill was quite pleased to give up ownership of the hill freely to David, but David responded:

No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing (1 Chronicles 21:24).

The kind of sacrificial giving, which drew the attention of Jesus, stood out from the other gifts that were presented that day. There were many, no doubt, who came bearing gifts, and I am sure that all of them exceeded hers, but her gift touched His heart more than the others because she gave despite her need. We saw in earlier passages how Jesus had been verbally attacked by those who had financial gain as their motive. He had cut into their income by not permitting money changing in the temple courts. In the second view of this passage, it was refreshing for Him to see one who gave her all. She will have great reward at the resurrection! I leave it to you, the reader, to make up your own mind as to how to interpret the passage. I think that all of these points are relevant.

Signs of the End of the Age

It was the Wednesday before the crucifixion. Jesus had spent from early morning till nighttime teaching in the temple (Luke 21:37-38). Matthew records that, after His pronouncing the seven woes on the religious elite and as soon as it became dark, Christ made His way through the eastern gate to the hill called the Mount of Olives only a few hundred yards from the temple (Matthew 24:1). More than likely, He slept in the Garden of Gethsemane so that in the early morning, as soon as the Eastern gate was opened, He could begin teaching those coming for the Passover. The word Gethsemane means *the olive press*. It was here that the Lord was pressed as the burden of His mission weighed heavy on Him. As they left the temple that Wednesday evening, the disciples took notice of how beautiful the stones of the temple were and how it had been embedded with precious stones. John the Apostle wrote that the building of Herod's Temple had started forty-six years before Jesus' crucifixion (John 2:20), and it was still many

years from being fully completed. (It was finished seven years before it was destroyed in 70 A.D.)

The Temple and its courts were one of the wonders of the world. To view the temple from the Mount of Olives would have been a spectacular sight. In his commentary on Luke, R. Kent Hughes tells us what Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived in the time of the temple, wrote:

The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no soon up that it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers, it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain, for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. From its summit protruded sharp golden spikes to prevent birds from settling upon and polluting the roof. Some of the stones in the building were forty-five cubits in length, five in height, and six in breadth.²

As they were heading east toward the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus spoke prophetically of the temple's being destroyed:

⁵Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, ⁶"As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down" (Luke 21:5-6).

Question 2) When the Jewish people heard these words about not one stone being left upon another, how do you think they may have reacted to this prophecy?

His reply was quite staggering to them. To hear that every stone of the temple would be thrown down had to be the end of the age as they knew it! Not that we should need confirmation of Jesus' words, but the prophet Micah had also spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and the reason for it, too:

⁹Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, ¹⁰who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. ¹¹Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." ¹²Therefore because of you **Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins**, and the mountain of the house a wooded height (Micah 3:9-12).

Not only was the temple destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D., but also it was further demolished in 135 A.D., the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed a second Jewish rebellion that was seeking independence. The revolt was led by Simon bar Kochba. Cassius Dio, a second century Roman historian, claimed that the Romans killed 580,000 Jews, and at that time, they completely destroyed Jerusalem and ran a plow over all or part of the city. All Jews were expelled and

² R. Kent Hughes, Commentary on Luke, Published by Crossway Books, Page 296.

banned from returning to Jerusalem under pain of death.³ Micah and Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. When the words of Jesus sank into the hearts of the disciples, they had to ask Him to explain when this would take place and what would be the sign of His coming to rule and reign:

"Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" ⁸He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. ⁹When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." ¹⁰Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:7-11).

Three of the Gospel writers give us parts of the same talk by Jesus; they are found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Matthew wrote that the disciples waited until they were seated together on the side of the Mount of Olives before they questioned Him about His prophecy (Matthew 24:3). Matthew and Mark record that there were two questions that they asked Him: "Tell us," they said, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus' words in reply to the two questions are the longest answer to any question posed to the Lord. These two separate events are the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in AD 70, and the time leading up to the return of Christ, which is already partly underway in our time, but this writer believes that the second part of their question, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3), speaks of a time, which is mostly still ahead of us.

Early Warning Signs of the End.

His first warning is of a time of great deception: "Watch out that you are not deceived" (v. 8). We are now living in that time of deception. Our enemy, Satan, has individuals in place who have gained control of all types of positions of influence in politics, media, and education, and they are promoting values and deception that brings society to a new level of degradation. The enemy is out to corrupt and control minds. This has always been the case. We are in a spiritual battle that will increase until the time that Christ returns. This is a time when we should be those who hold to the truth of Scripture and give no credence to the manipulation devices of the enemy, which can be seen in the media, the television, and the Internet. It is not that all that we see on TV is harmful, but we should regard with a healthy dose of skepticism anything that is on the airwaves. All should be tested against the standard of God's Word. Decide what and who you will believe. The Scripture tells us that we are not to believe everything, but we are to test the spirits. We measure everything against the truth of God's word.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

³ <http://www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/e31.htm>

Question 3) If deception is one of the early signs of the coming of Jesus, what things have you seen today that seek to lead people away from a knowledge of God and His Word? Do you feel that the idea of truth is being attacked today? How?

The Lord then went on to warn us about those who will come proclaiming that they are the Christ (v. 8). This is certainly a characteristic of the age in which we live. Many have already come proclaiming themselves as savior and thinking that they alone have the answers to the world's problems. I am convinced that more are ahead. There will be one who will claim that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) and will look to be worshiped as God. Along with him, there will be a religious figure, a man doing signs and proclaiming himself a lamb, but he inwardly has the nature of a dragon. He will demand that the world leader, the Antichrist, should be worshiped:

¹¹Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. ¹²He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and **made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast**, whose fatal wound had been healed. ¹³And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. ¹⁴Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:11-14).

Even though this man, commonly called the False Prophet, will perform great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth, we must ignore such signs and hold to what we have been taught in the Word of God. We must not be deceived! Even though there will be those seeking to deceive us into following them, Jesus tells us that this is still an early sign: **“These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away”** (Verse 9).

Wars and Revolutions

Deception, false leaders, wars, and revolutions are all early warning signs. Jesus warned us that nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom (verse 10). The statistics for those who died in the First World War is 31,508,200. For the Second World War, those that died amounted to 52,199,262.⁴ Over eighty-three million people died from just those two world wars in the Twentieth Century, that's without the many other wars that have been fought by various nations against one another.

During the Second World War, more than six million Jewish people were killed by the Nazis. This war brought about the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland of Israel. Since then, the Jewish people have fought five major wars since becoming a nation in 1948, i.e. 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. This is not to infer that Jesus was speaking about signs just in the nation of Israel. The prophetic signs spoken by Jesus are world events (Luke 21:35), but Israel has certainly had her share of wars and revolutions. The Lord said that there would not only be wars but also revolutions. When then Prime minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, controversially visited the Temple Mount on September 28, 2000, to pray as a Jew on their holiest site, the Palestinians rose up in revolution. Even though Jerusalem was recaptured from Jordan in 1967, the Temple Mount is still in Moslem hands. This started what is called the Second Intifada.

⁴ Statistics taken from the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A2854730>

Some Palestinian representatives dismiss Ariel Sharon's visit as the reason for the Intifada; instead, they feel that the catalyst for the violence was the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations on July 25, 2000. This uprising or revolution in Israel is only one of many that have been happening in recent years. All over the world, we hear of unrest.

The word *revolutions* is a translation of the Greek word, *Akatastatos*. It means:

a fixed or settled condition, the establishing or settling of something. Commotion, tumult, unruliness, disruption, disorder. It is used of political or social revolution, insurrection, sedition; riot, uprising, and disturbance.⁵

We are now facing a time when revolution against the accepted political order is coming to all nations. The world is and will be in turmoil. This is all part and parcel of our enemy's plan to bring chaos, fear, civil disturbance, and political revolution. In such a climate, control over the population of the earth will be easier for one man to rule over a one world government over the whole earth.

Luke then goes on to tell us that Jesus spoke next about earthquakes, famines, and pestilences that will be happening to the human race along with fearful events and great signs from heaven: **"There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven"** (Luke 21:11). Matthew adds a few words more. He speaks about those things being the beginning of birth contractions: **"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains"** (Matthew 24:7-8).

Question 4) By using the analogy of a woman in birth pains, to what do you think Jesus is referring?

When a pregnant woman begins the birthing process, the pain is not severe, and the birth contractions are several minutes apart. The closer she gets to the birth of the child, however, the more frequent the contractions are, with the level of pain getting much greater. In using this analogy, Jesus is saying that the closer the world gets to the end of the age, the more frequent will be the wars, revolutions, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. Just as the contractions of a woman get more painful, so will the amount of pain, anguish, sickness, and death of many on planet Earth. The wars and revolutions will be very severe with much loss of life. Matthew tells us that:

If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:22).

It will be cut short by the appearance of our Lord Jesus. He will come for those who are His. What does all this mean for you and me? It is time to make sure that we belong to Christ so that, when He comes, we will not be ashamed at His coming. We are living in awesome days, but we need not be afraid. We should look forward to the time when He returns. There is confidence and peace for all who understand that He holds all world events in His hands along with our

⁵ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Page 192 in the New Testament Lexical Aids.

own lives. In the light of this, we do not need to hold tightly to the things of this world. God is in control, and we need to remind ourselves of this fact.

In a parallel passage to Luke spoken at the same time, Matthew gave us seven woes that Jesus said about the religious leaders, ending with the Lord saying these words:

³⁷“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matthew 23:37-39).

We are living in a time when that prophecy is being fulfilled. I have been told that there are now 200 congregations of Messianic believers in the land of Israel. Jesus said that He would not come again until He would be welcomed by the Jewish people. How exciting to live in a time when many in Israel are reaching out to their Messiah!

Even though there are dark times ahead before the end comes, it is not all bad news. The darkness will not overcome the light. We are told what will happen in the last days:

Peter addressed the crowd on the days of Pentecost and he said:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophecy (Acts 2:17-18).

Despite what we may go through in this lifetime, I want to end with another quote Peter offered to the crowd on the day of Pentecost as he echoed the words of David when he said:

I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices, my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence (Acts 2:25- 28).

Peter told the crowd that this verse pointed ahead to speak of Jesus of Nazareth. He made the way for you and me so that we can also quote this verse and hold on to it in times of trouble. He has made known to us the paths of life! He has promised us joy in His presence. He has promised never to leave us and never to forsake us. We can trust that He is in control, regardless of what we see around us. We say, “Lord we trust you! Because You are at my right hand, I will not be shaken!”

Prayer: Father, as we see the unfolding events of this world, help us not to be troubled but, instead, live each day to the fullest. Help us to take each day as it comes and do our best to

follow You. We want to focus on things that are important, i.e. those things that have eternal value. We say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” Amen.

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